



March 11, 2010

2009 Human Rights Report: Preface

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

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Introduction to the 2009 Country Reports

2009 was a year of contrasts. It was a year in which ethnic, racial, and religious tensions led to violent conflicts and serious human rights violations and fueled or exacerbated more than 30 wars or internal armed conflicts. At the same time, it was a year in which the United States and other governments devoted greater attention to finding ways to acknowledge and combat these underlying tensions through showing leadership in advancing respect for universal human rights, promoting tolerance, combating violent extremism, and pursuing peaceful solutions to long-standing conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere. As President Obama said in his June speech at Cairo University, we should be defined not by our differences but rather by our common humanity, and we should find ways to work in partnership with other nations so that all people achieve justice and prosperity.

2009 also was a year in which more people gained greater access than ever before to more information about human rights through the Internet, cell phones, and other forms of connective technologies. Yet at the same time it was a year in which governments spent more time, money, and attention finding regulatory and technical means to curtail freedom of expression on the Internet and the flow of critical information and to infringe on the personal privacy rights of those who used these rapidly evolving technologies.

Today, all governments grapple with the difficult questions of what are appropriate policies and practices in response to legitimate national security concerns and how to strike the balance between respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensuring the safety of their citizens. That said, during the past year, many governments applied overly broad interpretations of terrorism and emergency powers as a basis for limiting the rights of detainees and curtailing other basic human rights and humanitarian law protections. They did so even as the international community continued to make tangible progress in isolating and weakening the leadership in violent extremist and terrorist groups such as al-Qa'ida.

This report explores these and other trends and developments and provides a specific, detailed picture of human rights conditions in 194 countries around the world. The U.S. Government has compiled these reports for the past 34 years pursuant to a requirement placed on the U.S. executive by law in part to help the U.S. Congress inform its work in assessing requests for U.S. foreign military and economic assistance, as well as to set trade policies and U.S. participation in the multilateral development banks and other financial institutions. The reason for publishing this report is to develop a full, factual record that can help U.S. policymakers to make intelligent and well-informed policy decisions. It has also been increasingly used by policymakers abroad and has become a core reference document for governments, intergovernmental organizations, and concerned citizens throughout the world.

Many have questioned the reason the U.S. Government compiles this report, rather than the United Nations or some other intergovernmental body. One answer is that we believe it is imperative for countries, including our own, to ensure that respect for human rights is an integral component of foreign policy. These reports provide an overview of the human rights situation around the world as a means to raise awareness about human rights conditions, in particular as these conditions impact the well-being of women, children, racial minorities, trafficking victims, members of indigenous groups and ethnic communities, persons with disabilities, sexual

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minorities, and members of other vulnerable groups. Also, we provide these reports as a form of comprehensive review and analysis. While some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) do extensive and excellent reporting on some countries, none cover the world as we do. And while we have encouraged more detailed and comprehensive reporting from the UN and other intergovernmental bodies, thus far these organizations have not met this need. Because of this unmet need, the U.S. Congress has mandated this report. Even as we continue this reporting exercise, we encourage the UN to take up this type of thorough and comprehensive reporting, and we stand ready to work with them to meet the challenge. We will continue to press for enhanced UN reporting, for example through the UN Human Rights Council as part of its review of its own operations in 2011.

Some critics, in the United States and elsewhere, also have challenged our practice of reviewing every other country's human rights record but not our own. In fact, the U.S. Government reports on and assesses our own human rights record in many other fora pursuant to our treaty obligations (e.g., we file reports on our implementation of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention Against Torture). We are reviewing our reporting, consistent with President Obama and Secretary Clinton's pledge that we will apply a single universal human rights standard to all, including ourselves. Later this year, the U.S. *Trafficking in Persons Report*, for the first time, will rank the United States as it does foreign governments by applying the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons set forth in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 as amended. And in the fall the U.S. Government will appear before the United Nations Human Rights Council for the first Universal Periodic Review of our domestic human rights situation.

These country reports are written to provide an accurate, factual record of human rights conditions around the world, not to examine U.S. policy responses or options or to assess diplomatic alternatives. Yet in a broader sense these reports are a part of the Obama Administration's overall approach to human rights and an essential component of that effort. As outlined above, the administration's approach, as articulated by President Obama and Secretary Clinton, is guided by broad principles, the first of which is a commitment to universal human rights. In preparing this report, we have endeavored to hold all governments accountable to uphold universal human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to their human rights treaty obligations. As Secretary Clinton stated in December, all governments, including our own, must "adhere to obligations under international law: among them not to torture, arbitrarily detain and persecute dissenters, or engage in political killings. Our government and the international community must consider the pretensions of those who deny or abdicate their responsibilities and hold violators to account." The first step in that process is to tell the truth and to identify specific instances where such violations are occurring and where governments are failing to take responsibility for holding violators accountable.

A second element of our approach is a principled and pragmatic engagement with other countries on these issues. This means that we will pursue steps that are most likely to make human rights a human reality. This principled pragmatism starts with an honest assessment of human rights conditions and whether violations are the result of deliberate government repression, governmental unwillingness or inability to confront the problems, or a combination of all three. As Secretary Clinton has said, "With China, Russia, and others, we are engaging on issues of mutual interest while also engaging societal actors in the same countries who are working to advance human rights and democracy. The assumption that we must either pursue human rights or our 'national interests' is wrong. The assumption that only coercion and isolation are effective tools for advancing democratic change is also wrong." These reports provide an essential, factual predicate upon which we can shape current and future policies.

A third element is our belief that although foreign governments and global civil society cannot impose change from outside, we can and should encourage and provide support to members of local civil society and other peaceful change agents within each country. As part of such efforts, these reports can and often do amplify these voices, by making reference to their findings, publicly reinforcing their concerns, and by widely disseminating this information to opinion makers, both internationally and within affected countries.

A fourth element of our approach is to keep a wide focus where rights are at stake and to adopt a broad approach to democracy and human rights. As Secretary Clinton stated, "Democracy means not only elections to choose leaders, but also active citizens and a free

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press and an independent judiciary and transparent and responsive institutions that are accountable to all citizens and protect their rights equally and fairly." President Obama has also highlighted the crucial linkages between development, democracy, and human rights, noting the centrality of issues such as corruption to the realization of basic rights. Consistent with that approach, these reports cover a wide range of topics and trends, providing a detailed and comprehensive picture of human rights and democracy in each country.

The fifth and final element of our approach has been to pursue progress on these issues through multilateral processes and institutions. As President Obama has acknowledged, we live in an increasingly interdependent and multipolar world, and to achieve our international goals, we need to collaborate with other governments and international actors. That is the reason we have joined the UN Human Rights Council, have actively supported human rights initiatives in the General Assembly, and have more thoroughly engaged in regional bodies like the Organization of American States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in promoting democracy and human rights.

In preparing these reports, we relied on information collected by officials in U.S. embassies around the world and on information from other governments and multilateral organizations. We also solicited and relied on useful information from nongovernmental human rights groups, both those operating internationally and those that work at a national level. We also collected information from academics, lawyers, trade unions, religious leaders, and the media. While we benefited from these many inputs, the U.S. Government alone bears responsibility for the content of these reports. The preparation of these reports involves a major commitment of time and energy by hundreds of people, and includes a lengthy process of fact-checking and editing to ensure high standards of accuracy and objectivity.

The Year in Review

In 2009, governments across the globe continued to commit serious violations of human rights. As we survey the world, there still are an alarming number of reports of torture, extrajudicial killings, and other violations of universal human rights. Often these violations relating to the integrity of the person are in countries where conflicts are occurring. These violent attacks are a central concern wherever they take place.

In a significant number of countries, governments have imposed new and often draconian restrictions on NGOs. Since 2008, no fewer than 25 governments have imposed new restrictions on the ability of these organizations to register, to operate freely, or to receive foreign funding, adversely impacting freedom of association. In many countries, human rights defenders are singled out for particularly harsh treatment, and in the most egregious cases, they are imprisoned or even attacked or killed in reaction to their advocacy. These restrictions and repressive measures are part of a larger pattern of governmental efforts to control dissenting or critical voices. This pattern also extends to the media and to new forms of electronic communications through the Internet and other new technologies. Restrictions on freedom of expression, including on members of the media, are increasing and becoming more severe. In many cases, such restrictions are applied subtly by autocrats aiming to avoid attention from human rights groups and donor countries, such as through the threat of criminal penalties and administrative or economic obstacles, rather than through violence or imprisonment; the end result is still a chilling effect on freedom of expression.

A third trend we observed is the continuing and escalating discrimination and persecution of members of vulnerable groups – often racial, religious, or ethnic minorities, but also women, members of indigenous communities, children, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups that lack the political power in their societies to defend their own interests.

These key trends are discussed in the subsequent sections, illustrated by thumbnail sketches of selected countries (ordered alphabetically) that were chosen for notable developments – positive, negative, or mixed – chronicled during calendar year 2009. For more comprehensive, detailed information, the individual country reports themselves should be consulted.

For full text, visit: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/frontmatter/135936.htm>

* As of April 2010, the main switchboard for the U.S. Embassy at its new location in Soba will change to +249-1-870-2-2000.

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